

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR - BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
SOCORRO FIELD OFFICE**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Bordo Atravesado Wild Horse Gather
NM-A020-2010-07-EA**

BACKGROUND

In the Wild Horse and Burro Act of 1971, Congress stated that: "Wild horses are living symbols of the pioneer spirit of the West." Further, Congress ordered the Secretary of the Interior to "manage wild free-roaming horses and burros in a manner that is designed to achieve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance on the public lands." From the passage of the Act through present day, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Socorro Field Office has endeavored to find that thriving balance.

The Socorro Field Office is required by:

- the Land Use Plan (Resource Management Plan for the Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management, Socorro Field Office, August 1989,)
- the Wild Free-roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971
- the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976
- the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978
- Federal Regulations 43 CFR 4710.4 and 43 CFR 4720.1

to periodically remove from the Bordo Atravesado Herd Management Area horses in excess of the established Appropriate Management Level (AML).

Gathers have taken place in 1980, 1983, 1985, 1987, 1992, 1995, 1997, 2001, and 2004/05. Additional, unrelated wild horses were introduced to the Bordo Atravesado herd in 1992, 1997, and 1998.

In 1989, the AML was increased from 32 head to 50 head due to improved range conditions.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

On the basis of the information contained in the EA, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that: (1) the implementation of the Proposed Action will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in *Socorro Resource Management Plan FEIS* (BLM-NM-PT-89-021-4410); (2) the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Resource Management Plan; and (3) the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement or a supplement to the existing environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts described in the EA or as articulated in the letters of comment.

CONTEXT

The Bordo Atravesado Horse Management Area (HMA), located within the Bordo Atravesado Allotment, is approximately 15 miles northeast of Socorro, New Mexico. There are 19,606 acres in the wild horse management area, consisting of 16,493 acres of public land (84 percent), 548 acres of private land (3 percent), and 2,565 acres of State land (13 percent).

The topography is generally mountainous with rolling limestone hills. The HMA rises from an elevation of 5,500 feet (1,676 meters) in the lowlands to a height of 6,970 feet (2,125 m) in the uplands. Prominent features on the WHMA include the Canon Quemado drainage, running in a north-south orientation through the western portion of the allotment, and the Bordo Atravesado.

A wild horse herd has been present in this area since at least the early 1950s. The HMA is overlapped by portions of the Stallion SMA and the Stallion WSA. The present herd consists of approximately 100 horses (adults and yearlings) with 40% of the herd animals located within the WSA on a year round basis.

The weather conditions have not been favorable for the past few years. The average annual precipitation for the state of New Mexico is 9.53 inches. Rain data from four nearby stations is given in Table 3 of the EA, which shows an average rainfall of 8.72 inches for 2008 and 6.55 inches for 2009.

INTENSITY

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the Bordo Atravesado Wild Horse Gather relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse

No impacts from the proposed action are expected to either cultural values or to threatened, endangered, or special status species. The Stallion WSA and SMA are not expected to experience any loss of wilderness quality or degradation in watershed health as a result of the proposed action. The livestock grazing operation would not be affected, and no associated increase in non-point-source pollution can be expected. The gather and removal of excess horses can be expected to improve vegetation availability within the HMA, which should provide more seed for future plant growth, additional feed for wildlife, and an increase the available forage for wild horses that are returned to the HMA. Individuals, and the herd as a whole, will experience short term stresses associated with the gather. The method proposed, water trapping, is the lowest stress method for the animals and the least dangerous for personnel. In most cases, the horses returned to the HMA can be expected to return to their familiar ranges within 12 to 24 hours. Those horses that are removed from the range, transported, and prepared for adoption will have adequate food, water, shelter, and veterinary care.

The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

The proposed action should have no effect on public health and safety. The gather is expected to last approximately two weeks, and will take place in a remote, rarely accessed part of the Field Office.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity of historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The Bordo Atravesado HMA is overlapped by the Stallion WSA and SMA. However, gather activities will not take place within these portions of the HMA and should not affect their wilderness qualities. The removal of excess horses should maintain current vegetation levels at the levels present at the time each special designation was created.

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The Socorro Field Office has performed similar gathers ten times over the last thirty years. While the public has commented on our methods and analysis and has come to observe gather operations, no protests or appeals have been filed.

This EA was posted to the Bureau of Land Management Socorro Field Office Planning web site. During the comment period, 113 comments were received, reviewed, and considered by the SFO. While it is clear from the comments that there is some degree of controversy surrounding the gather, this controversy is not expected to be significant.

The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Again, similar gathers have taken place ten times over the last thirty years. The observable effects to both the herd and to the human environment are well established, and should maintain vegetative cover within the HMA.

The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

As the proposed action is not new and does not involve either new methods or locations, there will be no new precedents set.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

No other reasonably-foreseeable actions will be taking place within the project area. As the HMA is largely overlapped by WSA and SMA, management activities are restricted over 74% of the acres within the HMA, so there are no previous management activities to consider cumulatively with the gather.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

The proposed action does not involve surface disturbance and does not constitute an undertaking for the purposes of implementation of section 106 of the NHPA.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

No known threatened, endangered, or special status species (or their habitats) were identified within the project area.

Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The proposed action is not in conflict with and Federal, State, or local laws, and in fact is mandated by several Federal laws, including: The Wild Free-roaming Horse and Burro Act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act.

/s/ Danita Burns

Field Manager
Socorro Field Office

6/1/2010

Date